



Sources of Data for Community Profiles: A Resource Guide for Community Health Assessment in North Carolina

State Center for Health Statistics and Office of Healthy Carolinians

February 2011

Purpose

For years, the State Center for Health Statistics has prepared the *County Health Data Books* associated with Community Assessment. The required public health community assessment and the resulting required Community Assessment Document are now on a four-year cycle, replacing the two-year cycle that was in place for more than 20 years. Each local health department is now assigned to a specific four-year cycle. Every year, a group of counties/local health departments engage in community assessments. The process involves community members surveying available data and determining their priority health problems, programs to improve these problems, and areas for legislative action each year. The main purpose of these *County Health Data Books* in the past has been to provide local public health departments with quantitative health-related data about their county as a basis for making decisions about public health programs.

In recent years, the community diagnosis or community health assessment process has expanded beyond the activities of local public health departments to encompass hospitals, voluntary health agencies, and many other community organizations. A major impetus behind this expanded community health assessment has been the development and activities of Healthy Carolinians Task Forces across the state. In addition, North Carolina has received funding from the U.S. Centers

for Disease Control for the North Carolina Community Health Assessment Initiative. A major goal of this initiative has been to strengthen and build on this collaborative approach to community health assessment, including combining the Community Diagnosis and Healthy Carolinians efforts.

As the focus of community health assessment has been broadened, there is a need for a wider range of data about communities. Through the *County Health Data Books* and other publications, the State Center for Health Statistics has provided county-level health data on topics such as mortality, live births, fetal deaths, abortions, cancer morbidity, communicable diseases, hospital discharges, birth defects, behavioral risk factors, and public health programs. The purpose of this document is to provide the reader with access to other data about communities that have not traditionally been included in publications of the State Center for Health Statistics. Examples would include data on housing, economic status, the environment, education, crime, mental health, child abuse, and social services. Factors such as these are often important determinants of physical health and set the context for public health problems and interventions. A broad approach to community health is also consistent with the spirit of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, which was established to integrate the provision of health and human services programs in North Carolina.